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THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Ἐλπίς το Ὁθια ἀν ἡνα ἡάρουις, ἀγυρ ριόδῶναι ἀπ ἀν ὁταλῆν ὁαγῶν το να δάοιμθ.

LUKE II. 14.

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THE HOPE OF THE CHRISTIAN.

SPRING is the season of hope and promise, when the joyous year has just burst from the bands of winter, and entered on a new course of fruitfulness, and a fresh dispensation of the rich bounties of the God of providence and grace—

"When the gay troops of woodland choristers begin,
In joyous thought, to plume the painted wing;
And try again the long-forgotten strain,
In music unconfeined."

On a bright day, in the early part of April, we had been sauntering through the beautiful gardens at Glasnevin, enjoying, with the songsters of the air, the glad promise of every opening flower and budding tree, and the refreshing shade of new spring leaves, and enjoying, besides, a pleasure in which they, perhaps, could not participate—the mirth and laughter of the little parties of children who played upon the green slopes that lead to its tiny river and rustic bridge. As we left this scene, refreshed and gladdened, we returned by the avenue of stately yew trees, which is one of the ornaments and celebrities of these classic grounds. They are called Addison's Yews, and, in their younger days, gave their shelter to Swift, and Steele, and Parnell, and Addison, when they visited the poet, Tickell, once the proprietor of the place. They are sacred to the memory of departed genius, wit, and fancy, and possess a deep interest to the mind of every reader of national literature. As we traversed this avenue, we came to a boundary wall—a low wall, covered with ivy, and surmounted with lofty iron railings, which divides the paradise of flowers from the city of the dead, and reveals to view the long lines of headstones in a thickly-peopled cemetery. Frequently as we have passed the spot, it ever comes upon us with a fresh surprise, a sudden unexpected change—we will not say, an unwelcome intrusion.

On the present occasion, though neither the time nor the season, nor our own frame of mind, were suitable to the mood of melancholy, but rather to the buoyancy of hope, the view that was opened to us was anything but disagreeable. The place had lately become invested with a new and deep interest in our mind—it contained the earthly remains of a dear Roman Catholic friend; and instead of turning from it with the intuitive distaste with which the child of pleasure and the man of the world turns from the funeral procession that meets him in the streets, and obtrusively tells him, "prepare to meet thy God," or with the pang of despair that wrings the heart of an anxious survivor, as he sees the grave close over the body of an impenitent sinner; we could rather look, with a sober complacency, upon the spot where lay the earthly tabernacle of one whose spirit, we believed to be at rest, and in the bosom of Jesus. Born and educated in the faith of Romanism, and never, perhaps, fully awakened to its errors or deadening tendencies, and too gentle for the field of controversy, her mind shrunk with an instinctive knowledge, or rather, a knowledge imparted by the unerring teaching of the Spirit of God, from placing her dependance upon any but Jesus. She would offer no prayers to saints or angels, nor, under the pretence of venerating, would she worship or adore them; and in her last illness, which overtook her in early life, her declared hope was in Christ

crucified, and in him alone; and all her virtues, and her merits, and her ceaseless charities, were, in her eyes, but as filthy rags, sinful and vile, unless as accepted in Jesus.

We immediately left the gay gardens and made our way over to the graveyard, and wandered through its labyrinth of tombs and monuments, till we reached the place underneath which were buried the earthly remains of our departed friend. As we passed along we met at every step the *Agnus Dei*, the representation of the Lamb of God, and the appropriate motto or legend with which the monumental tablets were surmounted—*Requiescat in pace*. It was indeed in no spirit of controversy or disputation that the solemn reflection suggested itself to our mind, in the midst of ten thousands of the dead, and standing over the grave of a beloved Roman Catholic friend—what is the peace which our Roman Catholic friends are led to hope for? What is the rest which their church leads them to expect? Can it be that after the Almighty God has forgiven every sin ever committed by us as to the eternal punishment, a temporal punishment yet remains to be inflicted, which the blood of Christ has not washed and cannot wash out, but the prayers and suffrages of the faithful on earth can accomplish the remittance of? And that after the eternal punishment has been done away with, we are to be purified in long suffering, and, like the wandering spirits of the heathen poet Virgil, to be

"Purged in fires"

"Till all the dregs are drained, and all the rust expires."

Is this the rest and the peace which the Christian church reveals to the departing servants of Christ? Is this the sleeping in Jesus in respect of which the Apostle, Paul, in 1 Thess. iv. 12 and 13 (Douay Bible), desires the Thessalonians not to be sorrowful as others? or can this be the blessedness of those whom the voice from heaven (in the Apocalypse of St. John xiv. 13), desired the Evangelist to write of, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours, for their works follow them." Is purgatory this rest? Or was this the hope of St. Paul, when he says (2 Cor. v. 1), "For we know if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven?" Did Paul expect that on the dissolution of his earthly body, or that of his Corinthian brethren, he or they should be consigned to the fires of purgatory? Was this his confidence, as expressed in the same passage (8th verse), when he says, "But we are confident, and have a goodwill to be absent rather from the body, and to be present with the Lord?" Was purgatory the presence of the Lord?

This surely was not the hope held forth by our blessed Lord to the dying thief on the cross, who, a moment before, had joined with the other in railing at him. The expiring thief cried to him, "Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise" (Luke, xxiii., 42, 43.) Nor was this the prospect which the first martyr of the church, Stephen, had visibly before his eyes, when, looking up steadfastly to heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God," and with his expiring accents, he cried, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*" There was nothing of purgatory there, nor when Paul was declaring the time of his own dissolution to be at hand, did he take such a miserable dishonouring view of the mercy of God, and the sufficiency of the atoning blood of Christ. He cries, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; as to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render me in that day." But, it may be said, Paul was an eminent servant and martyr, and this glorious hope was not the common privilege of the humbler members of the Christian Church. But hear St. Paul himself in the concluding words of the passage—"And not only to me but to them also that love his coming." So that it is a crown of justice which the Christian who loves the Lord's coming is privileged to look for, and not the fires of purgatory or hell. And why? Because

the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin (1 John i. 7), and because, as St. Paul says, Romans v. 1, "Being justified therefore by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" and in 8th chapter, v. 1, "There is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh."

Some of these texts suggested themselves to our mind, or, we confess, our reflections would have been mournful; we never could have thought the doctrine of purgatory anything but a cold consolation to the bereaved friend, and disparaging to the stupendous work of redemption; but having a better hope for our dear, departed friend who fell asleep in Jesus, we could joyfully enter into the spirit of the prayer of thanksgiving which the burial service of the Church of England puts into the mouth of the assembled mourners, when they return thanks to Almighty God, "for that it hath pleased him to deliver this, our dear sister, out of the miseries of this sinful world;" and in another service, when we bless God's holy name for "all his servants departed this life in his faith and fear."

We shall return to this most interesting subject again.

PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD.

WE undertook, in our last number, to show that the practice of praying for the dead, which we admit to have been very early practised in the ancient Church, offered no sufficient ground to support the doctrine now held by the Church of Rome on the subject of purgatory. It is, no doubt, true that the doctrine of purgatory includes the practice of praying for the dead; but it is quite another and different question, whether the ancient practice of prayers for the dead necessarily included or implied the existence of purgatory. To that question we shall now apply ourselves in all sincerity, and, we trust, with an ardent desire to arrive at truth, and lead others into it.

The first question is—for whom were those prayers used in the first three centuries, and what was the character of them? If we find them used for the pious and holy men whose souls, according to the belief of the universal Church, were then in heaven or paradise, such prayers obviously do not imply the existence of purgatory, and we must look for some other object in praying for the dead than a delivery of their souls from a state of suffering in any such place. It may be difficult to assign any one reason as the exclusive foundation of a practice which was not clearly referable to the Holy Scriptures; but several may be assigned, all of which seem to have conspired to foster such prayers, long before the period at which the doctrine of purgatory was generally believed, much less formally adopted by the Church. We shall refer to those reasons presently; but first inquire, whether the prayers of the pious living were, as at present, offered up for the relief or delivery of souls requiring to be cleansed in purgatory by suffering the temporal punishment due to their sins committed in their life, or whether the spirits of the blessed (who never were supposed to pass through purgatory) were also the subject of them. Upon this question there is conclusive and most satisfactory proof in the ancient liturgies of the Church, nearly all of which pray for the holy fathers, and orthodox bishops that are dead, as well as all others who had departed this life in their communion. The Liturgies of Alexandria, of Constantinople, of Theodorus, Nestorius, St. Basil, St. Gregory, and St. Cyril, all pray for the faithful dead, and especially those of the sacerdotal order; while that of the Church of Egypt ascribed to St. Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and Cyril of Alexandria, and that of the Church of Constantinople, said to be St. Chrysostom's, include the Holy Fathers, the patriarchs, the apostles, martyrs, confessors, evangelists, and the souls of the just who have died in the faith. Especially the ever blessed Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist, St. Stephen the first martyr, &c., &c. Surely we can affirm that praying for any of these implied that they were centuries after their deaths in purgatory; and we must look for some other cause for mentioning them in those prayers. To explain this, it will be necessary to state, that, in the early ages, many different opinions were

held by holy men, which all conspired to encourage the practice of such prayers, but none of which opinions were ever adopted into the church and do not afford any foundation at the present day for continuing such a practice. First, some believed that all the dead in Christ would revive within the compass of a thousand years, some sooner, others later, according as they had lived better or worse lives on earth, and such persons indulged the hope that, by their prayers, they might hasten the felicity of their friends, and accordingly prayed for their speedy rising in Christ's kingdom. Others supposed that in the general conflagration of the world at the last day, all men should pass through the fire, but the better Christian any one had been, the less he would feel the torment of it, and these prayed for the dead that God would have mercy on them in that day, and not suffer them to be burnt, (not in the fire of purgatory) but in the final conflagration at the end of the world. Others believed that the souls of just persons departed went not straight to heaven, but were reserved in a certain place, where they earnestly expected, and continually wished for their absolute commutation with all the faithful in Christ's kingdom, and these prayed that God would give them ease, repose, and refreshment in the bosom of Abraham, that they might be comforted with the blessed company of the holy angels and the vision of our Saviour Christ, till the so-much-wished-for day of judgment should come. Others might be added, some of them fanciful enough; but as the question is not whether the practice of praying for the dead is either innocent, laudable, or availing, but whether it necessarily involves a belief in such a state of suffering, as purgatory is represented to be, we shall not occupy the time of our readers by a repetition of them. The Church of Rome has, long since, discontinued all such prayers for the saints and martyrs, and substituted prayers and invocations to them in lieu of prayers for them. As an example, we may mention St. Leo, whom we referred to in our last number. In the ancient missals, the church prayed for the soul of St. Leo, which, at a later period, was changed into a prayer to God, by the intercession of St. Leo, in behalf of themselves; thus, by their new doctrine making him an intercessor for us, who, by the old doctrine, was supposed to need our prayers to intercede for him. Will any one say that St. Leo the Great was in purgatory during the former period, and that it was only on his escape from thence that he became an intercessor? If not, the conclusion is plain, that praying for the dead, according to the notions of the ancient fathers, did not imply the existence of any such place as purgatory. And, however ancient such practices may have been, they, so far at least, must be admitted to be also antiquated and obsolete, according to the modern doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome. Those who follow the views of Dr. Newman will, doubtless, say, that the true doctrine of purgatory was not then developed—but those who, in a more orthodox manner, base their creed on primitive traditions, alleged to have been handed down from the times of the apostles themselves, will be obliged to look for some better proof of an universal belief in purgatory, in primitive times, than the practice of praying for the sainted dead in the second and third centuries. We believe that some few instances may be found in the writings of the early fathers, which afford some reason to think that they hoped some good might even be done to departed sinners by the prayers and oblations of the survivors; but they are generally put forward rather argumentatively and as expressing a pious hope (which some even extended to those suffering the pains of hell), than as a settled tenet or doctrine of the Catholic Church, that such prayers did avail to relieving the departed from suffering, much less to relieving or removing them from such a place as the purgatory now received in the Church of Rome.* They appear to have amounted at most to prayers, that God would forgive them their sins, accompanied by the hope that they might impart some consolation and comfort to them, small though it might be; and St. Gregory himself (who at a later period gave countenance to the doctrine of purgatorial fire, as we have already stated, and who did not die till A.D. 604), teaches expressly that "this is to be believed possible only so far as little (nay the least) sins, such as constant idle speaking, immoderate laughter, or too great anxiety about private affairs, or in non-essential matters, the error of ignorance."†

If prayers or masses for the dead were now supposed to go no further than the remission of such sins as those, we do not conceive any great confidence would be placed in them, nor any sufficient inducement to purchase these priestly offices at so large a sacrifice as is often made to obtain them. Were we to venture a speculation upon a subject so difficult as that of tracing the origin and progress of what we deem a metaphysical and theological error, we should, perhaps, say, that the practice of commemorating or praying for the faithful dead, in the course of time, led pious men into praying for sinners also, in the hope, rather than the belief, that some sins might possibly be remitted after death, and that at last by degrees the notion of purgatory arose; so that it would be more correct to say the doctrine of purgatory arose out of the practice of praying for the dead, than that prayers for the dead were founded on or originated out of the doctrine of purgatory. We do not find any of the Fathers of the first four centuries asserting that there is such a place as purgatory, much less stating that they possessed any tradition as to it not to be found in the written Word of God; and we beg the intelligent reader to observe, that we do not contend that the question is to be decided by the private opinions of the Fathers, or any of them, but that we refer to the Fathers merely as faithful witnesses of high character, of what was held and believed in their times or those preceding them. Where they refer to any tradition, we are willing to credit that such a tradition then prevailed, but their mere reasonings or opinions we must be allowed to take, just as Cardinal Bellarmine and other Roman Catholic writers take them, as the reasonings and opinions of good and learned but fallible men, who not unfrequently differed considerably from one another, more especially in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, to which, in the earliest ages they were constantly, if not exclusively, recurring as an authority. An instructive example may be found in the dialogues of St. Gregory the Great, already referred to, in which he bases his defence of the doctrine of purgatory not on ancient tradition, but on a construction of the passage in Matt., xii., 31, 32, wherein it is said that blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven either in this world, nor in the world to come—from which he deduces (we think erroneously), that there are some lighter sins which may be forgiven in the world to come. Had he known of an universal tradition handed down from the Apostles, it is possible that he could have omitted to refer to it as a well-established ancient doctrine, instead of trying to account for it as a new discovery, only disclosed then because the world was near its close?

HINTS TO THE WISE.

"Our fathers believed it, our priests believe it, a great many of our neighbours believe it, and therefore, if I believe it, I cannot be far astray."

This is a very common mode of thinking and speaking, but undeserving of the name of argument. It strikes at the root of all inquiry after truth. The beaten track is followed because it is beaten, though there might be many shorter and safer pathways up the mountain or across the moorland. The man enters the emigrant vessel because he sees others of his countrymen enter it, and they go in because they see him going in; and thus, without examining whether or not their ship be sea-worthy, they huddle in, not knowing whether her timbers are water-tight or unsound. But surely this is not the course that prudence would point out. The careful, diligent, active man, who is about to bring his family on board, and has a concern for the safety of his own life, will naturally look at the ship outside and examine her within, and get every information he can as to her character, ascertain if the captain be skilful and supplied with the best charts, and all other means necessary to secure a safe voyage, if it were for no other purpose than merely to satisfy his own mind that all is right. But he that takes his berth because others do so, and, when a storm is near, feels no anxiety, because his captain is on board, and many others have confided their lives to his supposed skill as well as he, should well consider that others may have embarked as rashly as himself, and that the captain having become fool-hardy from usage to the sea, may have run great risks for the sake of gain, or (as human passions lead men on to great blindness) for the sake of victory, should there happen to be a rivalry between his and another ship.

If men had shut their eyes on all inquiry after human knowledge, as too many Catholic laymen, we fear, have done in the case of Divine knowledge, in what a wretched plight would our world be placed? The darkness of the middle ages would be ten-fold thicker, on account of the successive incrustations of ignorance; for it is a truism, that in nature there is nothing stationary. We must either progress or retrograde. Where now would be

the thousands of improvements in almost every science? It were endless to name them. The noble science of astronomy will be a sufficient illustration. For many centuries the Ptolemaic system was in catholic estimation: if men had reasoned respecting this, or rather surrendered their rights and powers of reason, as too many Roman Catholics do respecting the science of theology, where would our present knowledge of the greatness of God's universe be? Let the persecutors of Galileo answer.

But to try the matter in a simple case. Suppose a number of people to be on an island, detached from all communication with the rest of the world, and that an opinion prevailed among them that they were the only people in the earth. Suppose this opinion handed down from father to son, and in no danger of being corrupted by reason of a law, and that a stringent one, that no boat or ship should be built; so that the inhabitants are unable to put off from their island to discover whether or not there be other nations or other islands more blessed and favoured than their own. In such a case suspicions might arise in the minds of some who found pieces of foreign timber cast upon their shore, but still they must stifle such notions, for the law would tell them, and tradition confirm it, that there is no other land but theirs, and that they must not venture from the shore, or they would be inevitably lost amid the world of waters. Who can doubt that many would believe it, either through a slavish deference to the law, though based on the ignorance of its founders, or from a superstitious fear of drifting away on a shoreless ocean. And though some daring Columbus now and then should succeed in evading the coast-guard, and reach some glorious continent over the waves, no doubt still the authorities would try to persuade the poor people that such have miserably perished, and that their letters, conveyed back to their ignorant friends, were mere cheats and tricks of enemies wishing to allure some of the simple people to a similar fate. Is there nothing like this among ourselves? Let those who prefer light, and knowledge, and freedom, to darkness, ignorance, and slavery, answer.

THE TALK OF THE ROAD—NO. IV.

WELL, Father John did not curse Jem after all; at least, not this time. Maybe Father John thought it hard to take the bit out of the mouths of Jem's children; or maybe there were too many to be cursed; or maybe Father John had read the first number of the CATHOLIC LAYMAN, and saw what came of the priest cursing the miller.

But Pat and Jem did not know yet that the curse was not going to be now, and so it happened, the next day, when they sat down to dinner under the thorn bush, they began to talk of it.

"And what made him so angry, entirely?" said Pat. "Sure we only wanted him to set us right; and if he would only take the trouble to teach us what is right, sure we would be willing to be taught by him, and give him every respect. And sure if we just went on as we used to do, and never offered to learn anything at all about God, or the Bible, or the Saviour of sinners, we would never get a cross word from him no more than some of the boys that think no more about religion than the horses and cows does; and yet Father John has nothing but a pleasant word for them; and I never see him get cross, entirely, till it's the Bible that's in it; and what's the reason he was so angry?"

"Indeed," said Jem, "that's what I'm thinking of all day; and there's something in it that's not right; for ask him what I will out of the Bible to get him to explain it to me, or set me right, it's not about that thing he'll speak in his answer at all; just as if he didn't care how far I went astray in it; but it's always the one answer he has, 'it's reading the Bible you are,' says he; that's his cry; as if the very name of it angered him so that he could not teach us anything out of it at all."

"And maybe that's just near the truth," said Pat. "Maybe it's little he knows it himself, and he's afraid to take on him to teach it."

"Well, I'd think that too," said Jem, "only that he gets so angry about it. For when I see that look in his face, when he hears of the Bible, it isn't like as if he didn't know it at all himself; it's a deal liker as if he knew it too well, and that it wouldn't be on his side; and sure it's that that would make him angry in earnest, and nothing else that I can see."

By this time Jem was near the end of his dinner, for it was little that day, poor fellow, for he had the wife and eight children at home; and he was just going to peel his last potato, and little enough it was to keep him till night at his work, when his little son, Billy, (just four years old), comes running up the path, with his bright hair blowing in the wind, as pretty as you could see.

"Oh, what will I do with the childer at all, when Father John curses me?" says Jem. And with that Billy runs up to him crying, "Oh, daddy, daddy, gimme a praty."

"Be off out of that, you young thief," says Pat, "and don't be taking the dinner out of your daddy's mouth."

"Easy, Pat," says Jem, "sure if it was the last praty I had in the world, or if I'd never eat a praty again,

* Thus St. Cyril of Jerusalem, says—"I know there are many who say, what good can it do to a soul which is deprived out of this life, whether with sins or without them, to be remembered in this sacrifice? But tell me, I pray you, if a king had sent into banishment some person that had offended him, and their friends should present him with a crown of great price to appease his anger, might not the king, on that account, show some favour to the guilty persons? So do we address our prayers to God for them who are dead, though they were sinners, not by presenting to him a crown, but by offering up to him the souls who were sacrificed for our sins, propitiating him who is so merciful to them and for us." St. Cyril deo. d. 886.—Catechesis ad Greg. V. p. 228. Paris.

† Sancti Greg. Page 1, opera, Paris, 1705, tom. II., p. 442. Dial. IV., cap. 39.—

"E. quibus sententia constat quia qualis hinc quibus credidit in hunc iudicium presentatur. Sed tamen de quibusdam levibus culpis essentia iudicium purgatorium ignis credendum est, pro eo quod veritas dicit, quia si quis in Sancto Spiritu blasphemiam dixerit, neque in hoc seculo remittetur ei, neque in futuro. In qua sententia datur intelligi, quoniam culpe hinc sententia, quoniam vero in futuro possit lauari. Quod enim de uno agitur, consequens intellectus patet.

quia de quibusdam conceditur. Sed tamen ut prudenter, hoc de parvis criminibus quod peccatis Beriposis credendum est, sicut est, otiosus sermo, inmoderatus ritus, vel peccatum coram re familiaris, quod vix sine culpe vel ab ipso agitur, qui culpas qualiter declinare debeant accipiant; sed in non gravibus rebus error ignorantum, quoniam sancta etiam post mortem gravant aliquid in hac vita, postea minime fuerint relaxata. Hoc tamen sciendum est, quia ille saltem de minimis nihil quique purgationis obtineat nisi bonis actibus in hac etate vita postea ut ille credimus, promeretur."